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ABSTRACT

The researchers compared the perceptions of school climate of teachers participating in individually guided education programs (IGE) with those of non-IGE teachers. The subjects were 127 elementary school teachers from three upper-midwest suburban school districts. The subjects were members of the faculties of 16 elementary schools engaged in an innovative program designed to enhance staff development through inservice education. The data confirmed that the climate of IGE schools is viewed as more positive by its teachers than the climate of non-IGE schools. Although the results of this study are credible but far from conclusive, the researchers believe that their Staff Development School Climate Questionnaire is a potentially more valuable instrument for measuring school climate than many other measures. (Author)

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Organizational Climate And IGE: An Assessment & Implications*

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Introduction

Schools differ markedly, not only in architecture, socio-economic status and ethnic population but also in atmosphere, tone, climate and "feel" (Owens 1970). A school almost has its own individuality or intangible personality (Halpin & Croft 1963). The concept of climate or atmosphere should be important to administrators and teachers because their collective perceptions of their school climate may be an indicator of satisfaction level for themselves and kids.

What evidence does one examine to determine school climate? A great deal has been written on that question. Most of those writers would agree with the definition of organization climate that is offered by Litwin & Stringer (1968). They define climate as "a set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by people who live and work in this environment and assumed to influence their motivation and behavior" (Litwin and Stringer 1968). Just what those properties are may vary however, from author to author.

Most climate measurements start with the basic step of assessing the perceptions individuals have about their interactions and interpersonal relationships with others in the organization. Both informal and formal relationships are assessed. For example, Halpins' Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire measures perceived teacher behavior along the dimensions of Esprit, Intimacy, Hinderance (principal burdens teachers with routine busy work) and

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Disengagement (teachers focusing on task). The OCDQ also assesses perceived principal behavior along the dimensions of Production emphasis, Aloofness, Thrust (principal's effort to move the school) and Consideration (Halpin & Croft 1963).

Another example of a climate instrument is the Organizational Climate Index developed by Owens and Steinkoff (1970). Their OCI examines the variables of Intellectual Climate, Achievement Standards, Practicalness, Supportiveness, Orderliness and Impulse Control (control of personal expression). There are many more instruments as the bibliography of this article would indicate that the reader could use if needed.

Importance of Organizational Climate

Assessing the climate of a school would be of importance to teachers and administrators for three general reasons. The first reason is that it would be helpful information when adopting, evaluating or making a decision to continue an innovation. A key factor that influences innovation is organizational climate and motivations of participants (Berman et. al. 1975). As the Rand study indicated "key elements to an innovations' success are high teacher morale, support from the principal and district administrators, and teacher willingness to make extra efforts " (Berman 1975). Also, effective innovation implementation altered the formal and informal organizational relationships among staff and among teachers and students (Berman 1975).

In addition, when educators, boards of education, and the general public, are considering whether or not to continue an innovative program, they may want to assess its effects upon staff morale and attitudes. Since teachers' perceptions of school climate form and change along with student attitudes and behavior, one logical approach when studying the effects of an innovation, would be to analyze teacher perception of school climate.

The second reason why organizational climate is important has to do with the schools capacity for problem solving. When the school administrator has goals and a direction for the staff and students, those goals are not always easily accomplished. Problems arise, and tolerance must be developed by all involved if a school is to overcome them. Climate assessment and "management" is important for an administrator because in order to more effectively solve problems and handle conflict, the system must have a climate which "supports open confrontation of differences, receiving and giving feedback, and generally fosters an atmosphere that invites open interaction and discussion" (Schmuck & Runkle 1972).

The third reason that the climate of a school is important to consider is that climate influences, or is an indicator of, the motivational level of those who are part of the organization (Fox et. al. 1974, Owen 1970). In a sense, a measure of school climate can be an assessment of staff satisfaction with interactions and procedures that go on in a school (Conway 1976). If a measure of school climate is a measure of staff satisfaction and satisfaction is related to the amount of motivation and effort a teacher or staff puts into the job, then it seems logical that administrators would want to know about the prevailing climate in their school.

The climate of a school can be influenced and the principal is the key to that influence (Breckinridge 1976, Fox et. al. 1974). The principal can influence the school climate and increase the motivation of staff and students.

Reason For Present Study

As has been stated, there is a high correlation between climate and the successful implementation of an innovation. The authors made an implicit assumption that a measure of "openness' or positive atmosphere" in an education

organization can be used as a predictive device for judging the probability an innovative practice has for success.

The findings presented here resulted from an evaluation of a Title IV C innovative project dealing with staff development. In this evaluation the present investigators attempted to determine whether or not "openness" had any bearing on the thrust of an innovative staff development program. Also, if the innovative staff development project did have an impact, then the authors assumed that the school climate of those schools involved would change if the project was successfully implemented.

The staff development project involved three school districts in a cooperative effort to individualize most inservice activities for teachers by providing money through a formal written proposal basis. A steering committee of teachers and administrators judged these proposals on a competitive basis and made the grant awards. The evaluation of this project involved the use of other assessment techniques besides the climate scale. In the course of this staff development project assessment some interesting differences were noted between the attitude scores (perceived school climate scores) of a group of elementary IGE teachers and their non-IGE counterparts. This paper will deal with the IGE non-IGE differences in attitude scores and will not address the broader scope of the staff development evaluation.

Procedure

Subjects: The subjects consisted of 127 elementary school teachers (11 males and 116 females) from three upper-midwestern suburban school districts. The subjects were members of the faculties of 16 elementary buildings engaged in an innovative program designed to enhance the staff development process in

each of the three districts. As inferred above, three of the buildings were, and had been involved with IGE procedures for a period of two to three years. (No attempt was made to establish the degree of IGE implementation). The majority of the remaining schools were composed of typically self-contained classrooms with the exception of one building which was "non-graded".

Instrument. In an attempt to assess the attitudes of teachers in the study toward staff development, an instrument was designed to measure this construct as well as selected climate dimensions. This instrument, the Staff Development School Climate Questionnaire (SDSCQ) developed by the authors contained subscales addressing five dimensions (a) Communication (Teachers in this school feel free to talk to each other about their work); (b) Innovativeness (The faculty at this school are generally quick to adopt improved teaching methods); (c) Advocacy (The principal makes a real effort to improve working conditions at this school); (d) Decision-making (The teachers in this building are generally involved in decisions related to their work); and finally (e) Attitude toward Staff Development, (Staff development/inservice contributes to the improvement of the curriculum). A Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree) was used to assess the attitude level of the subjects. There were several items for each subscale.

The subscale of Communication (12 items) was designed to measure respondents' perceptions as to how well information is shared among groups such as school boards, the central office, the building principal and colleagues. Communication is defined as the listening to concerns as well as the ease with which ideas are exchanged among groups and cliques.

The Subscale of Innovativeness (12 items), measures the respondents' perceptions of how well educational innovations have been supported in the past

by the school board, the central office, the building principal and colleagues. Innovation is defined as the use of new ideas in the classroom.

The Subscale of Advocacy (13 items), measures the respondents' perceptions concerning the rapport and professionalism that exists between colleagues. Advocacy also connotes the concern for teacher welfare that is demonstrated by the school board, central office and building principal.

The Subscale of Decision-Making (9 items), measures the respondents' perception as to the amount of opportunity there is for input into decisions made at the school board level, central office level and building principal level.

The Subscale of Attitude toward Staff Development (12 items), measures attitudes the individual has toward inservice and inservice activities sponsored by the system. Three themes designated were attitudes toward inservice in relation to Individual Growth, Classroom Application and Application to System Needs. A relationship was sought between relevancy and utility of inservice activities experienced and use to the individual teacher, classroom situation and system needs.

It should be noted that although attitude toward inservice activities is not usually thought of as a climate indicator by most authors reporting on climate, this subscale showed a high correlation with the traditional climate indicators such as communication, decision making and openness to innovations.

The original instrument contained a total of 63 items. When psychometric analyses of the data were completed, this number was reduced to 58 items with 5 subscales. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach, 1961) for the revised instrument by subscale were: (a) Communication. 84; (b) Innovativeness. 87; (c) Advocacy. 83; (d) Decision-making. 81; and (e) ASD. 92. Within each subscale the internal consistency was quite acceptable.

Administration. The instrument was administered during the first year of the staff development program in the spring of the academic year. The original intent was to gather baseline data from which to assess progress in the total staff development program. It was at this point that marked differences in raw scores between IGE and non-IGE schools were noted.

Method. An analysis of variance was used to test the significance of differences between IGE and non-IGE teacher scores. The results of this comparison are presented in Table I. As can be noted, the IGE subjects manifested higher mean scores on all of the subscales. Further the differences were significant (.01) in the subscales Communication, Advocacy and Decision-making.

Table I

Discussion. As has been stated many studies have been written on the concept of organizational climate - Cornell (1955), Halpin (1966), Owens (1970), Schmuck and Runkle (1972), Shaheen and Pedrick (1974), and Fox et. al. (1974). There are some studies done specifically on climate and IGE implementation such as Kelly et. al. (1973), Feldman (1977), Bolin (1975), Burtley (1974), Gresso (1974) and others. The findings are somewhat mixed when examining IGE practices.

Bolin (1975) reported no differences on overall scores on the Organicational Climate Description Questionnaire, although the IGE schools exceeded the non-IGE in the subtest of Esprit, and scored below the non-IGE schools in the subtest of Production Emphasis. Kelly et. al (1973) found no differences in overall scores between IGE schools and the national norms on the Organizational Climate Index.

The studies that have shown differences in scores between IGE and non-IGE schools have reported on very specific dimensions of organizational climate.

Differences reported by Feldman (1974), the CEPM study (1973) and Herrick (1974) address the dimensions of decision making, with IGE schools showing less centralization and more dispersed decision-making. Burtley (1974), Gresso (1974), and the Ames, Iowa study (1976), all found greater teacher communication and compatibility in IGE schools as compared to non-IGE schools.

The discrepancies between the findings of these studies were not the reason for the study described here. The strength of this study is, however, that, in an attempt to assess organizational climate in the context of the evaluation of an innovative staff development program, the data confirmed that the climate of IGE schools is viewed as more positively by teachers.

As noted above, three of the five subscales, Decision-making, Communication and Advocacy were significantly more positive (.01) in the IGE schools than in the non-IGE schools.

Implications. Because these findings emerged as a residual of a larger total study the results are credible yet far from conclusive. These reported results are supportive of Feldman (1974), CEPM (1973) and Herrick (1974) on the dimension of decision-making and those of Burtley (1974), Gresso (1974) on the dimension of communication. There was one IGE school in the three that did show a significant difference on all five subscales. This data could be the result of greater IGE implementation. There are both research implications and administrative implications that might be implied from this study.

Research Implication. From a research perspective, perhaps the residual results suggest that the SDSCQ is a more appropriate measure for the process and goals of IGE than other measures in use. Perhaps a larger study is in order using the SDSCQ, encompassing a larger population and making distinctions between demographic differences in the (rural, urban, suburban, inner city) population,

as well as the degree of IGE implementation. The present investigators feel, however, that this finding should be investigated further, since there is definitely an indicator of a more "open" climate in the case of the IGE schools investigated. (The SDSQ is available and the authors would like to aid those IGE schools interested in assessing their organizational climate.)

Administrative Implications. The administrative implications are at least threefold. The first implication is that if an IGE school was considering the adoption of a innovative classroom technique, or new curriculum materials the chances are good that an innovation will succeed. This study gives supporting data that teachers in IGE schools tend to have more input in decision making, have greater communication among each other and feel highly supported by the principals. These conditions greatly enhance the implementation of innovations. A principal of a school that has a "open" organizational climate can feel confident that innovative effects are possible within his/her school. Another way to make the point is to say that innovative practices may have a greater chance to be effectively implemented in an IGE school than in a non-IGE school because of organizational climate.

A second administrative implication is that an IGE school may have a greater capacity for problem solving. If the differences between IGE school climate and non-IGE school climate hold up under further research then it would appear that the IGE processes and concepts would aid a school to be more effective in problem solving because it results in openness to more input in decision making, greater communication, and greater sense of professionalism among teachers.

A third administrative implication is that this study and others show that IGE, as an organizational process, may result in schools that have

a greater sense of support between teachers and administrators, more inter-communication among staff and greater involvement by teachers in the decisions that effect the schools' operation. To the extent that teachers and administrators need and want an open climate in their school there is a chance for greater satisfaction and motivation in the work situation. Golembiewski (1972) and others have noted, as organizational affiliation becomes more a part of every human beings work and life, both the individual and the organization will require more of each other. Even with economic constraints systems can offer individuals increased work satisfaction by improving organizational climate.

Table 1

SUMMARY TABLE OF MEANS AND F VALUES OF THE SUBSCALE SCORE COMPARISONS BY IGE NON-IGE GROUPS

Subscale	Means		F
	Non IGE (N=96)	IGE (N=31)	
Communication	51.26	58.36	18.03
Innovativeness	50.89	53.16	2.39
Advocacy	52.65	59.52	16.51
Decision-Making	36.73	43.52	32.07
Attitude toward Staff Development	47.78	50.77	2.23

Sign. .01 with 1 and 125 df, F=6.84

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